WHAT WE ARE FIGHTING FOR

AMERICAN REPLY TO THE POPE'S PEACE PROPOSAL.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
WASHINGTON, August 27, 1917.

TO HIS HOLINESS, BENEDICTUS XV., POPE:

In acknowledgment of the communication of your Holiness to the belligerent peoples, dated August 1, 1917, the President of the United States requests me to transmit the following reply:

Every heart that has not been blinded and hardened by this terrible war must be touched by this moving appeal of his Holiness the Pope, must feel the dignity and force of the humane and generous motives which prompted it, and must fervently wish that we might take the path of peace he so persuasively points out. But it would be folly to take it if it does not in fact lead to the goal he proposes. Our response must be based upon the stern facts and upon nothing else. It is not a mere cessation of arms he desires; it is a stable and enduring peace. This agony must not be gone through with again, and it must be a matter of very sober judgment what will insure us against it.

His Holiness in substance proposes that we return to the *status quo ante bellum* and that then there be a general condonation, disarmament and a concert of nations, based upon an acceptance of the principle of arbitration; that by a similar concert freedom of the seas be established; and that the territorial claims of France and Italy, the perplexing problems of the Balkan states, and the restitution of Poland be left to such conciliatory adjustments as may be possible in the new temper of such a peace, due regard being paid to the aspirations of the peoples whose political fortunes and affiliations will be involved.

It is manifest that no part of this program can be successfully

carried out unless the restitution of the *status quo ante* furnishes a firm and satisfactory basis for it. The object of this war is to deliver the free peoples of the world from the menace and the actual power of a vast military establishment controlled by an irresponsible government, which, having secretly planned to dominate the world, proceeded to carry the plan out without regard either to the sacred obligations of treaty or the long-established practices and long-cherished principles of international action and honor; which chose its own time for the war; delivered its blow fiercely and suddenly; stopped at no barrier, either of law or of mercy; swept a whole continent within the tide of blood—not the blood of soldiers only, but the blood of innocent women and children also and of the helpless poor; and now stands balked but not defeated, the enemy of four-fifths of the world.

This power is not the German people. It is the ruthless master of the German people. It is no business of ours how that great people came under its control or submitted with temporary zest to the domination of its purpose; but it is our business to see to it that the history of the rest of the world is no longer left to its handling.

To deal with such a power by way of peace upon the plan proposed by his Holiness the Pope would, so far as we can see, involve a recuperation of its strength, and a renewal of its policy would make it necessary to create a permanent hostile combination of nations against the German people, who are its instruments; and would result in abandoning the new-born Russia to the intrigue, the manifold subtle interference and the certain counter-revolution which would be attempted by all the malign influences to which the German Government has of late accustomed the world. Can peace be based upon a restitution of its power or upon any word of honor it could pledge in a treaty of settlement and accommodation?

Responsible statesmen must now everywhere see, if they never saw before, that no peace can rest securely upon political or economic restrictions meant to benefit some nations and cripple or embarrass others, upon vindictive action of any sort, or any kind of revenge or deliberate injury. The American people have suffered intolerable wrongs at the hands of the Imperial German Government, but they desire no reprisal upon the German people, who have themselves suffered all things in this war, which they did not choose. They believe that peace should rest upon the rights of peoples, not the rights of governments—the rights of peoples great or small, weak or

powerful—their equal right to freedom and security and self-government and to a participation upon fair terms in the economic opportunities of the world—the German people of course included if they will accept equality and not seek domination.

The test, therefore, of every plan of peace is this: Is it based upon the faith of all the peoples involved or merely upon the word of an ambitious and intriguing government on the one hand, and of a group of free peoples on the other? This is a test which goes to the root of the matter; and it is the test which must be applied.

The purposes of the United States in this war are known to the whole world—to every people to whom the truth has been permitted to come. They do not need to be stated again. We seek no material advantage of any kind. We believe that the intolerable wrongs done in this war by the furious and brutal power of the Imperial German Government ought to be repaired, but not at the expense of the sovereignty of any people—rather a vindication of the sovereignty, both of those that are weak, and those that are strong. Punitive damages, the dismemberment of empires, the establishment of selfish and exclusive economic leagues, we deem inexpedient and in the end worse than futile, no proper basis for a peace of any kind, least of all for an enduring peace. That must be based upon justice and fairness and the common rights of mankind.

We cannot take the word of the present rulers of Germany as a guarantee of anything that is to endure, unless explicitly supported by such conclusive evidence of the will and purpose of the German people themselves, as the other peoples of the world would be justified in accepting. Without such guarantees treaties of settlement, agreements for disarmament, covenants to set up arbitration in the place of force, territorial adjustments, reconstitutions of small nations, if made with the German Government, no man, no nation could now depend on. We must await some new evidence of the purposes of the great peoples of the Central Powers. God grant it may be given soon and in a way to restore the confidence of all peoples everywhere in the faith of nations, and the possibility of a covenanted peace.

(Signed) ROBERT LANSING,
Secretary of State of the United States of America.

TAFT COMMENDS THE PRESIDENT'S REPLY TO THE POPE.[1]

I strongly commend President Wilson's attitude toward the Pope's peace proposals, as shown in the extracts you have wired me. The present union of the democratic peoples of the world, in a titanic struggle to defeat German militarism, is Providential and affords an opportunity for the greatest step forward in Christian civilization taken in centuries.

This opportunity and the enormous sacrifices the Allies have made and are making to cut the cancer of militarism out of the body politic of the world must not be wasted by a patched-up compromise peace with the Hohenzollern Prussian military caste still in control of Germany's military and foreign policy. Such a peace would be a mere truce to be ended when the Kaiser, the Crown Prince, Hindenburg and Ludendorff think it wise. All the world must continue armaments after such a peace in mere self-defense, and the world's blood and treasure, spent as never before, will have achieved nothing.

Our goal is permanent peace, and that is impossible until by force of arms we have established international morality and the sacred character of every nation's obligations as a basis for international law.

By defeating their present rulers we shall show the Germans the futility of the false philosophy with which they have been poisoned by fifty years' teaching, and reveal to them the hideous futility of the sacrifices they have made to the Frankenstein of military autocracy. The survival of that monster will be fatal to the safety of democracy. It must be destroyed, because without real and lasting peace the peoples who embrace democracy cannot secure its great benefits.

The victory in the present war of the unprepared democracies of the world over a military power, developed to its highest efficiency by half a century's discipline and application of the most scientific principles, will make the German people see. When the scales thus fall from their eyes, and not till then, will the nations of the world be able to use their power jointly to secure world peace. Hence let there be no peace without victory of righteousness over wrong.

WILLIAM H. TAFT.

[1] By telegraph to the New York *Times* from Pointe au Pic, Quebec, August 29, 1917.

AMERICA'S WAR AND AMERICA'S OPPORTUNITY.

BY A. LAWRENCE LOWELL.[1]

Every great catastrophe turns our thoughts to the realities that underlie human life. We are moved to ask ourselves what is superficial and what is eternally true. What our efforts and our principles signify. Whether we are like butterflies, getting what pleasure we can from sunlight and flowers, living a life of instinct, and dying when the least danger overtakes us; or, whether our lives should mean the building up of moral principles that shall make life nobler, better and happier, not chiefly for ourselves, but for those who shall come after us. As we look back over the long stretches of history we feel sure that the men who taught higher morals, enlarged the bounds of human sympathy, and did heroic deeds, have permanently enriched and ennobled human life. Where do such thoughts lead us in entering the present war?

We are witnessing the greatest catastrophe that has befallen Europe, certainly since the wandering hordes overran the Roman Empire and destroyed its civilization. After the fall of Rome social order had to be rebuilt from the foundations, ultimately on a higher plane, no doubt, but by a long and very painful process. For centuries we have been working slowly upward, with many obstacles from ignorance, from prejudice, from shortsightedness, from selfishness, individual and co-operative; but still with a striving toward a better justice, more mercy for the unfortunate and oppressed, keener sympathy with suffering, and a fuller respect for the right of every man, woman and child to be treated, not as a mere tool in the social workshop or a pawn in the great game of national ambition, but as an end in himself, whose happiness, whose material—and above all whose moral—welfare should be the aim of civilization. We are very far, as yet, from having achieved such a result, but this is the direction in which the best men have been striving to move. The question now is whether we shall continue to work for that principle or substitute for it the doctrine that the fruits of the earth belong to the strongest people, who may take them by any means within their power, however ruthless these may be.

[1] Address at the meeting of the National Safety Council, September 12, 1917.

The striving to make life more humane has not been confined to times of peace. In the case of war also an effort has for generations been made to mitigate, through the rules of international law, the injury and suffering inflicted; by protecting the rights of neutrals; by confining the operations to the armed forces of the antagonists, leaving noncombatants unmolested, forbidding looting and sparing property not directly needed for military purposes. Mercy has even been extended to soldiers,—by the provision of the Hague treaty, for example, which was signed by Germany,—forbidding the use of poisonous gases in war. In the present conflict the German armies have violated all these rules, not under stress of calamity, but deliberately. Those who believe that Providence or a moral power rules in the affairs of men may well point to the fact that if Germany had not, in violation of a solemn treaty, invaded Belgium, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to bring the English people to the point of taking part in the war, however eagerly any British statesman might have desired it; that if it had not been for atrocities in Belgium, and the dropping of bombs from the air on defenseless towns in England, recruiting there would have been far less rapid, and the British Empire would not have put forth so gigantic an effort; that had it not been for the sinking of merchant ships on the high seas and the drowning of their crews, the United States would not now be in arms against Germany.

The Allies believe that the German military autocracy planned this war with malice aforethought, to enlarge the territory, enhance the power and expand the commercial prosperity of their nation. The German people have been taught by their rulers that the war results from an attempt by England to drive Germany, which strove for peace, out of a place in the sun; although those rulers supposed that England was in no condition to fight, and were obviously disappointed when she took part with France. But no one imagines that the United States planned the war, or had any share in bringing it on. Wholly unprepared for hostilities abroad, and contrary to our long-established principle of keeping clear of conflicts in Europe, we have been drawn in by violation of the rights of our citizens, and by the spectacle of barbarous treatment of neutrals and noncombatants. No one suspects that we have any national ambitions to gratify, any lust of conquest to be fed; but we shall fight none the less vigorously from righteous indignation and for an ideal of civilization that we will not suffer the enemy to destroy.

No vast upheaval that lays bare the foundations of human society can pass away and leave things as they were before. Geological convulsions may destroy the soil formed by ages of silent growth and thickly falling leaves, replacing it by a barren waste; or they may heave upward veins of coal and ore or precious stones that, unsuspected, lay deep below the surface. This war cannot leave the world as it was before. The result must be either a worse world or a better one. If Germany should win, the principles of her government must triumph, the ruthless rule of force, exploiting the earth for the benefit of the strong, suppressing other peoples, and beating down small, weak or peaceful nations. If the result should be a drawn battle, a stale-mate, with Germany in her present state of mind, the whole world will probably become a series of armed camps, preparing for another fray, and compelled by the very conditions by which they are faced to adopt the methods of warfare Germany has introduced, —that is, the nation in arms using every resource at its command and striving to destroy by every means the resources of the people to which it is opposed. Can any one contemplate without horror a planet whose inhabitants devote their efforts to devising scientific processes for making it unfit for human habitation? Yet such is the result that we must at least contemplate if the present war should decide nothing, leaving the belligerents with their former ambitions and principles, with fiercer hatreds and a better knowledge of what the next war will signify.

If, on the other hand, the side on which we are fighting wins, it may mean a better world, re-organized on a basis of justice and peace; and much of the result may depend upon us, both in the field and at the council table.

Let us be perfectly clear in our own minds. We proclaim that we are fighting for democracy, but President Wilson has put it more accurately when he said that we are at war to make the world safe for democracy. We are not fighting to impose any form of government upon an unwilling people. That would be contrary to our principle of political liberty. If any people prefer to be ruled by a monarch it is their affair, *provided* they mind their own business, leave other nations alone and live peaceably with their neighbors. A military autocracy, that goes forth conquering and to conquer, the world must subdue, or it will have no peace; moreover, the oppression of one race by another must, so far as possible, be removed.

We are at war to prevent any nation from imposing an autocratic

military system on the world, or on any people; and when the Allies have succeeded in so doing, they, and any other peoples that sincerely desire a better and more peaceful world, must solemnly resolve that no such catastrophe shall occur again. For this purpose they must not split apart into discordant fragments or hostile groups, but must combine to police the world, and bring in a reign of international justice among men.

We often boast that we are both an idealistic and a practical people, and in the re-organization that will follow this war we have the only chance we shall probably ever have to show these qualities on a world-wide scale. We are now a world power engaged in a world war, and we cannot, by shrinking into ourselves when it is over, evade our duty or shut our eyes to our own future security. In league with the other free nations of the earth we must set up an international court of justice, and a sheriff armed with such force as may be needed to summon offenders before the tribunal. By so doing we can fulfil a great destiny for our nation and bring peace and good-will among men.

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